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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the "failure" experienced by four female novice teachers who were successful in university course work but experienced considerable difficulty in their initial teaching assignments. The difficulties these women encountered are examined through analysis of observation notes, interview transcripts, journals and autobiographical writing, and recordings of their classroom teaching. The analysis focuses on the women's personal histories, understandings of themselves as teachers, instructional problems they experienced, and the contexts of their beginning teaching experiences. The paper concludes that these perceived failures resulted not from any single factor but from the cumulative effect of such factors as unassertiveness, compliance, low self-confidence, and underdeveloped conceptions of instructional techniques and management routines. More connected, collaborative styles of supervision, which might have allowed these capable women to do more than "survive" their initial teaching experiences, are identified. Five types of experiences for prospective and beginning teachers are suggested: validating their personal experiences as students and teachers, using those experiences to explore their personal histories and develop models of teaching, helping them create expectations of success, encouraging their comfort with the experience of "not knowing," and creating expectations of appropriate support and mentoring. (Contains approximately 90 references.) (JDD)

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FOUR WOMEN'S STORIES OF "FAILURE" AS BEGINNING TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study focused on the "failure" experienced by four female novice teachers. All four were successful in university course work but experienced considerable difficulty in their initial teaching assignments. While only one of the women actually "failed" and withdrew from student teaching, each perceived herself as a "failure" in the classroom, and all four chose alternate careers upon completion of the assignment. Drawing on literature identifying patterns in women's thinking, conceptions of knowledge, and modes of learning, we examined the difficulties these women encountered through analysis of observation notes, interview transcripts, journals and autobiographical writing, and recordings of their classroom teaching. We described the problems they encountered, focusing on their own perceptions of those problems. We identified alternative patterns of supervision which might have allowed these capable women to do more than "survive" their initial teaching experiences, and we argue for more gender-balanced conceptions of teachers' growth and development.

FOUR WOMEN'S STORIES OF "FAILURE" AS BEGINNING TEACHERS

> Learning from experience [is] the aspect of learning to teach that we least understand. . . . The weak student teacher seems very slow to learn from experience. The criticisms and suggestions we offer, in good faith and with belief in verbal learning, seem to have little effect in enabling the weak teacher to improve. Rather than questioning our medium of communication or our assumptions about how one learns to teach, we conclude that the weak student teacher "failed to take the advice" offered by teachers and tutors. Ultimately, a few drop out or fail, and we conclude that they were "not cut out to be teachers"; our premises remain intact. Why is it so easy to fault the student who learns slowly, the student for whom it is not enough to use the processes that seem to be effective with those who progress quickly? (Russell, 1993, pp. 148-150)

The subject of beginning teachers' "failure" is not often discussed among teacher educators. Yet, understanding failure may contribute as much as understanding success to our attempts to assist others, as well as ourselves, in the quest to improve teaching practice. In this study, we examine the "failure" experienced by four female novice teachers. We ground this exploration in two broad areas of work: research on "failure" in teaching, and constructivist understandings of the processes of learning and knowing.

Within the small body of research which directly addresses the "failure" of preservice and beginning teachers, four clusters of factors may be identified as contributing to poor performance in field settings (Knowles & Cole, with Presswood, 1994; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991). One cluster includes elements of personal histories and patterns of past performance which impact behaviors in contemporary educational settings (Goodman, 1987; Knowles, 1988, 1992; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). A second group focuses on development of a sense of self in a teaching role (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Ryan, 1986). Problems associated with planning and implementing instruction and classroom management comprise a third group (Schwab, 1989; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Pape & Dickens, 1990; Veenman, 1984). A fourth cluster deals with contextual factors in teaching situations, including relationships with cooperating teachers and unfamiliarity with the institutional culture (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991, 1992b; Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). Such factors may interact in combinations

which have serious consequences for a novice teacher's capacity to function effectively in initial teaching episodes.

A second body of research which informed this study is grounded in the understanding that individuals construct personalized meanings from their experiences (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Eisner, 1991; Schön, 1987; Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987). This constructivist premise underlies a line of inquiry which seeks to validate multiple conceptions of knowing, a few of which are identified as differences among experts and novices (Berliner, 1987; Livingston & Borko, 1989), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), modes of knowing (Eisner, 1985), and personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985). In particular, in this study, we used a body of work illuminating women's ways of knowing, learning, and interacting in educational settings (e.g., American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Gender has been raised as an issue in teaching; Lortie (1975) and Grumet (1988) examined social and institutional contexts that may restrict women's growth and limit the roles they fill. However, the relationship between women's conceptions of knowing and learning and the work of novice teachers has seldom been explored (see Hollingsworth, 1992, for one example). Interrelationships among these areas of research on thinking and knowing, combined with work on student teachers' and beginning teachers' "failures," provided a framework for this study.

Our Approach

This paper draws on findings from three separate studies which were closely linked methodologically, if not in time and place. To gather data about the beginning teachers' experiences, we made extensive observations as participants in their classrooms and held regular (weekly or monthly) interviews with the women and those regarded as their mentors: cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and others. Each woman maintained a semi-structured journal–some more extensive than others–recording her reactions to her experiences. Observation notes, interview transcripts, recordings of classroom teaching, and journals were analyzed. Individual

stories of the experiences were written for each novice teacher (Knowles, 1992, 1994; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Schmidt, 1994), following principles for interpretive case study research (see, e.g., Eisner, 1991; Strauss, 1987; Merriam, 1988). We confirmed the analyses with the teachers; in two cases, the analyses were a result of considerable interaction with the teachers themselves.

Findings reported recently by us (Schmidt, 1994; Schmidt & Knowles, 1994) provided an impetus to revisit the data we had previously collected and analyzed. In the process of analyzing data about Anna and Gail we became acutely aware of the similarities of their stories with those of Angela and Nancy, suggesting the usefulness of further analyses in light of the theoretical framework we described earlier in this paper. Thus we re-analyzed and reinterpreted the dat, developing additional perspectives or reasons for the women's difficulties and perceived failures.

The Beginning Teachers

In understanding the women's experiences of "failure," similarities and differences among their situations and backgrounds provided useful comparisons. Nancy was 25 years old, with college majors in history and social science. Her assignment as a first year teacher was teaching Spanish to junior high students. Nancy hoped that the community-like atmosphere and small classes at this private school would help put a difficult student teaching experience behind her. Angela was a 37 year old second-career preservice teacher, assigned as preservice teacher to teach "[her] two worst subjects," science and history, in a large suburban junior high school. Gail and Anna were traditional-age student teachers in instrumental music, each assigned to work in three different schools with three cooperating teachers and students from grades 5 through 12.

Within their various contexts these novice teachers felt considerable pressure to succeed and broaden their experience. For example, to make herself more "marketable," Gail directly addressed what she perceived as a weakness: she requested a placement which "made [her]" teach high school band, because "[she] wanted to avoid [it, but knew she] needed the experience." Throughout the 15 week semester, Gail worked each day with three different cooperating teachers. She began her day with one class at the junior high, followed by three or four elementary school

band classes, and spent the afternoon with the high school band. Anna also worked with three cooperating teachers, teaching both band and orchestra in grades 5 through 12. However, these three cooperating teachers worked closely together. Anna traveled with them during lunch hour each day between the junior and senior high buildings in a rural school district.

All four women had been successful students. In particular, professors in their respective university teacher education programs considered the women's work intellectually strong. Yet, each woman expressed the dawning realization that she had earned good grades, not by learning useful information, but by being obedient and compliant in school, and this sense contributed to uncertainty about her readiness to be a teacher. Angela was enrolled in a graduate teacher preparation program which provided integrated theoretical study and practical experiences, with a student teaching assignment at half teaching load for two quarters, supported by regular student teaching seminars. However, Angela was withdrawn from student teaching after six weeks of the second quarter. Nancy participated in an undergraduate teacher education program, one that was traditional in its structure, and voluntarily enrolled in a seminar offered for first year teachers. The seminar intended to facilitate the new teachers' understandings of both the contexts within which they found themselves teaching and their available curricular and instructional options. Its specific purpose was to enhance their classroom practices and facilitate their understanding of the macro and micro socio-political elements of working in schools. In contrast, Anna and Gail were enrolled in a competency-based teacher preparation program, which emphasized the acquisition of specific skills for teaching music, and seldom encouraged the prospective teachers to reflect on their learning or consider concerns beyond their own potential classrooms.

All four women were apprehensive about teaching. As Angela approached the first day of student teaching, she was "reminded of all the 'first days' of school as a kid, and how frightened [she] was then." Driving to her assigned school in an unfamiliar city, on crowded, nerve-wracking freeways, added to her concern. Anna described her own worries:

> It's so scary. Every once in a while I'll think, "I can't be a teacher. What am I doing? Forget it, I'll do something else." But I'm like, "Well, whatever else I choose, I'll never have done that either." It's just the unknown–it makes me really

> nervous, and there's not a whole lot I can do about that until the time comes. It's just a matter of trying to be confident, "Yes, you can do this. It'll take work, but you're trained and you can do this." But it's often hard to convince myself of that. (Anna)

Each of the women also had personal goals for learning from the student teaching experience. Angela intended to do well enough to get a job to support her family while her husband completed his studies. Gail hoped teaching would help change her tendency to be "wimpy," a weakness pointed out to her by all her university professors.

> I think teaching will improve my [French horn] playing a whole lot. It did [at the music camp where I taught] because I was following the advice I was giving my kids. . . . And I think teaching will help me as a person too, because I'll have to be confident in order to be good. And I won't stand for doing anything less than my best.

Some Common Threads

Despite the diversity of their backgrounds and initial teaching assignments, the difficulties the four women encountered were quite similar. We discuss these difficulties in light of the four clusters of factors identified in the research literature on "failure": their personal histories, their understandings of themselves as teachers, the instructional problems they experienced, and the contexts of their beginning teaching experiences.

Personal Histories

Elements of the novice teachers' personal histories played out in some powerful ways. The women's expectations as beginning teachers, like those of other novices, were derived in large measure from their own experiences as children in families and students in schools (Crow, 1987; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). All four women had been successful students, yet had surprisingly few specific or positive memories of their own pre-college education. All four women had been shy and socially awkward; they themselves had marginal status as junior high students, and they found those old feelings returning as they began to assume a teacher's role.

> I feel like a foreigner in a foreign land going, "Where do I fit in?" . . . I don't really know any of the kids, and there's nothing to keep me very busy, so I often just stand around looking stupid. I feel like I should be talking to the kids, but I have

> no idea what to say. I hope the relationship changes once I actually start working with the kids. This is just a really gross feeling. I wonder if it's typical. (Anna)

Later in the semester, Anna began to realize that she was now "the teacher," and could actually approach "the popular kids" to talk to them.

All four described their favorite teachers in non-specific terms that were more emotional than analytical. Anna remembered that her third grade teacher made school "fun." She liked "her personality as a teacher" and the fact that "she did a lot with poetry." An "awesome" English teacher in high school was a favorite as well, although "it [was] hard to say what exactly it was about her" that was so great.

> I had a couple violin teachers. They were [pause], hmm [pause]. Probably they weren't as demanding [as my piano teacher]. That isn't to say they were bad, but just they weren't as demanding. They were nicer, not really nice. I don't know how to say it. (Anna)

Nancy valued teachers who established a relationship with her.

> I was a shy kid. The most effective [teachers] for me were the ones that reached out to me and . . . made contact with me. I enjoyed their classes more . . . and it helped a lot; my attitude [toward school] changed [according to] how well I did in class. (Nancy)

Their memories of least favorite teachers were a little more specific.

> Teachers that don't really teach you anything. Teachers that say, "That's pretty good, keep working on it" but don't give you any sort of constructive criticism or help. And mean teachers. I don't know–I guess you have to be disciplined or whatever to some extent, but you can't learn from them if you're scared of them. (Anna)

> A lot of the teachers that I didn't like didn't have a lot of respect for their students, or maybe they didn't know what they were doing. Or, they didn't make their intentions clear, and then sort of got mad at the kids if they didn't do what they thought they were asking the kids to do. (Gail)

Gail did not worry when these teachers got angry, because she was never the target of their anger. She usually "sat back" and waited, thinking that if the offending students "would just be good, [the rest of the class] wouldn't have to waste any time." In general, the women's own understandings of the teachers they themselves wished to become were equally vague, and primarily negative ("I don't want to be like that") rather than positive ("I want to be like this"). They were preoccupied

with being "liked" and "respected" by their students, but had only vague notions of how such relationships were achieved.

A greater issue, however, was that none of the women had experienced "authority" as a positive, facilitory, concept. Their own understandings of "assertive" teachers derived from memories of themselves as obedient students, eager to do whatever they needed to avoid a teacher's displeasure. Although they "knew" from university courses that "students appreciate discipline" (Gail), they genuinely believed that all students would feel ashamed, as they had, at even a mild rebuke from a teacher. They hesitated to reprimand students for ill-behaviors for fear of causing them to feel "scared or embarrassed;" they worried about injuring a child's self-esteem or causing a student not to "like" them. The feelings of anger, discomfort–and, eventually, despair–evoked in them through even the most minor confrontations with "disobedient" students were unexpected, puzzling, and consumed incredible amounts of emotional energy.

> I realize that I'm not doing as well as a student teacher as is expected. Controlling the students is much more difficult than I imagined it could be. I'm very uneasy with them. It is very difficult for me to "threaten" them or make them beieve they should do what I want. (Angela)

Consequently, although the women received advice to "be more assertive" or to "not let the kids get away with" inappropriate behavior, they lacked experiential understandings of positive ways to assume power in a teaching role (Noblit, 1993). They expected the students to be willing to "help [them] out" (Gail); they simply could not comprehend how to respond to students who did not want to cooperate or learn from them. Their attempts to "be assertive" were either not effective or "worked" only for a day or two; then they sought alternative advice, which was similarly only momentarily successful, creating a cycle of "failure" which contributed to their feelings of inadequacy as teachers. The women's inability to break this cycle by conceiving of alternative management practices was reflected in a conversation Gail had with her supervisor. The students had been very noisy, and the supervisor asked Gail what she might do differently next time.

> Gail: Well, I think the pace would be smoother if they would just shut up and listen to what I have to say. Point blank, you know. Because if they're talking it distracts me from thinking about what I'm going to say.

Supervisor: Then how could you get them to do that?

Gail: Keep them quiet.

Self as Teacher

The women's personal histories also impacted their understandings of the teacher's role, and of their own fit with that role. They saw themselves as caring, concerned teachers and desperately wanted students to know that. Unfortunately, in a sense, prior teaching experiences contributed to their dysfunctional perceptions of classroom management. In early field experiences they worked in informal settings with self-selected, motivated students, allowing them to retain some aspects of their identity as students. For example, as beginning teachers, Gail, Anna, and Nancy initially assumed the more familiar role of camp counselor, intending to be "buddies" with the students; they failed to perceive a distinction between strategies which were successful in small groups and the dynamics needed in a large group school setting. Similarly, Angela was very comfortable working with small groups and had extreme difficulty teaching a "whole" class. However, unlike the other women–perhaps because she was much older than them–she did not aspire to be buddies with her pupils.

As beginning teachers, these various roles, effective for small group work, were ineffective in larger class settings, and the women felt increasing discomfort with what they perceived as antagonistic reactions from the students. The resulting anger they felt surprised them, and the "teacher" behaviors they adopted in response felt very uncomfortable, because they had not previously viewed themselves as "angry" people.

> I'm tired from being so mad for two hours! [The students] were talking every time I stopped. And they're just not trying! . . . If I don't get mad, no one takes me seriously because my personality is normally like I'm always laughing or something. And they're pushing me over the edge a lot–which is really surprising because I just don't get mad. (Gail)

They began to believe they were not "caring" or "good with people" after all, thus doubting even the few positive perceptions they held of themselves.

The women struggled all quarter or semester to find appropriate and comfortable management strategies, asking advice from cooperating teachers, peers, supervisors, and

University faculty. Most of the mentors suggested that they needed to "assert themselves" in the classroom; yet all four expressed concern that this required them "to change their personalities." Gail had several traumatic discussions with her university supervisor, a graduate teaching assistant, which he characterized as "hour and a half psychology sessions," during which Gail insisted she "[didn't] know how to change [her] personality" to do what he suggested; she claimed to feel dishonest and hypocritical "bluffing" the students by pretending she felt confident when she did not. Similarly, Nancy "worried . . . that [the students] were not enjoying [her] personality." Yet, when she tried to build her own confidence by "talking positively" to herself, she "felt like [she was] lying." Angela and Anna expressed strikingly similar concerns.

> I told [the professor] he was asking me to completely change my personality. I had been taught to speak softly and not be assertive, and that changing years of learned behavior was going to be difficult! (Angela)

> [The cooperating teacher] will just sort of ignore [the talking] until it gets out of hand, then he'll yell, "Shut up!" . . . He tends to get them excited–that's just his way. . . . And it's not my personality. So I have to take his personality and try and work with that, and it's really difficult. (Anna)

Thus, all four women were unable to reconcile their perceptions of themselves as persons, and of the teacher they desired to be with the behaviors they believed were required for them to maintain order in the classroom. The socializing influence of students and the general expectations of acceptable teacher practice only confounded the complexity of "finding their own style" (Angela) and "being themselves" (Anna) in classroom situations. Bullough (1990) described the relationship between teachers' understandings of themselves as teachers and their classroom practices.

> The problem of finding oneself as a teacher, of establishing a professional identity, is conspicuously missing from most lists of beginning teachers' problems. . . . Admittedly, the problem is slippery, often manifesting itself in other problems, such as inconsistency, which in turn produces difficulty with classroom discipline and management. (Bullough, 1990, p. 358)

Instructional and Management Concerns

The women's teaching practices at first did not seem much worse than other novices. Their early experiences were characterized by uneven performance and glimpses of promise, as they

demonstrated a willingness to seek advice and to experiment with a variety of instructional and management practices. However, unlike beginners who "succeed," their performance did not demonstrate consistent improvement; they seemed unable to implement both the advice that was offered, or to learn from their mistakes.

> Most beginners seem to develop adequate teaching performances quite quickly–learning from experience if the assumption I have suggested is followed. . . . The weak student teacher who does not respond to advice is less able to learn quickly from initial practicum experiences. . . . It is the case of the weak student teacher that should be the source of evidence for questioning our faith in learning from words. (Russell, 1993, pp. 149-150)

As a way of focusing, we discuss the emotional contexts within which the women appeared to develop their instructional and management strategies, to illuminate the nature of their problems in learning from both their own experience and the verbal advice of others. In particular, we explore their overwhelming feelings of "not knowing" how to manage the complex demands of the classroom, and their apparently inconsistent teaching practices.

Not knowing

All four women had been successful working with small groups of students, both in pre-student teaching settings, such as summer camps or tutoring sessions, and in early field experiences in school settings. Yet, they were completely overwhelmed by the need to manage the simultaneous and competing demands of teaching in regular classrooms. Anna described this feeling:

> Often you're just busy thinking about the lesson, "What am I going to do next?" and evaluating, "Are they doing what I've asked them to do? Is this right? Are they learning notes?" And trying to discipline at the same time and thinking ahead–Ahhh! (Anna)

Because of their own consistent success as students in academic settings, this feeling of "not knowing" was particularly unfamiliar and frightening for them. They found the tasks of keeping on top of subject matter, school and classroom processes and policies, and the affairs of the day and week, very demanding. They were demoralized by their lack of knowing.

> I hate the frequency with which I say "I don't know." No matter what class I'm in it is inevitable that I will be asked at least five questions to which I don't know the answer (usually like where I can find this music or how do I fix this saxophone or

> how much is a swab). Because I haven't been around, I simply don't automatically know how things operate, and saying "I don't know" about fifty times a day just makes me feel gross. It's amazing how three small words can have such a large effect. (Anna)

Each responded to this sensory overload in her own way, attempting to act on her perceptions of the advice offered her while simultaneously preserving some feeling of control. Nancy, attempting to cope with both curricular and management concerns, altered her Spanish language teaching practices a number of times throughout the year, tacking back and forth between an initial "immersion" approach with a great deal of conversation, to more structured seat work and grammar exercises. Angela and Gail simplified the teaching environment for themselves by ignoring those students who did not appear interested in what they were teaching.

> When all four students arrived Gail told them that they needed "to be learning more steadily" and to do that there would be no talking allowed. She began warm up drills with the horn players. One of the girls said, "I can't play this instrument." The other said, "I'm not going to be in this class next quarter." Gail told them they were doing well, but needed "to learn to keep trying and persevere." She continued with the warm ups. . . . The girls pulled out some paper, obviously writing notes to each other. Gail said, "Ladies, you can put that away." They did not stop and, although Gail never mentioned it again, they talked and wrote deliberately at every opportunity for the remainder of the class period. Gail continued with her lesson, covering everything she had planned. (observation notes)

Anna was so overwhelmed by the intensity and number of decisions required of her that she eventually abdicated all responsibility and waited to be "told what to do." She described her ambivalence as a combination of being "lazy" and "chicken."

> Yeah, lazy, chicken–they kind of go together. I don't know which one it is, but it was sort of, "I'm here to get experience, but don't make me do it." . . . It's easier for me to sit and watch. Once I would get up there and [teach], it was always okay–usually. It wasn't a horrible experience, but I would always dread it. I would always not want to do it. . . . And I wasn't like that every day. . . . I think it comes from sort of being chicken: "Maybe if I don't say anything, then I won't have to do anything tomorrow." As much as I wanted the experience, I was always very willing for [the cooperating teachers] to change plans and have me running copies. (Anna)

Inconsistent Teaching Practices

All four women entered the classroom with solid knowledge of curriculum and beliefs about what "good" teaching was. All of them disliked "boring" teachers; consequently, one of their primary management "strategies" was to make class "interesting" and "fun" for their students.

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Angela, encouraged by conversations with her cooperating teacher, developed "interesting" laboratory lessons "to stimulate discussion and discovery by the students" in the science classes. Nancy held a "mental picture" of her classes where both she and the students "would be laughing a lot." She expected that "good teaching is like good friendship. Teaching is built upon friendship and respect. When students feel like 'teacher is buddy' they learn." Anna and Gail believed the instructional sequence they learned at the university made music classes "fun" while teaching important skills. Occasionally the women succeeded in achieving their goal. Gail described her experience with one fourth grade class.

> We had solo time at every end of the class, and I'd play a couple little games here and there. And I tried to think of things that would help them [learn to read music]. One class, I put a masking tape staff on the floor for them, and I'd play them a song and they'd have to hop around from one note to another, and they thought that was terrific! (Gail)

Each of the women also had occasional positive encounters with individual students. To boost her lagging sense of self-as-teacher, Nancy played a game with her class called "Kiss the Frog," requiring each student to "pay compliments" to others in the class, and she was pleasantly surprised at the compliments extended by the students to her as well. A student Anna reprimanded for talking in class stopped by after school to apologize. Some of the students in Angela's class responded with great interest to the lessons she offered. A high school boy offered to do a routine job that Gail's cooperating teacher had unceremoniously delegated to her. Unfortunately, these small successes did not cumulatively contribute to feelings of increasing competence and confidence. The women's spirits were lifted momentarily by such encounters, but they soon returned to a despondent focus on the students who appeared to "hate" them (Nancy) or "not respect" them (Gail).

The women were quite surprised to discover the extent of the mental and emotional effort required to "discipline" students; they "did not know" how to establish sufficient order in their classrooms to sustain what they felt were "fun" and productive teaching and learning experiences. Their attempts to "control" the students "worked" occasionally for a class period or two, if at all, and the students quickly reverted to their noisy or distracting behavior. All four women claimed to

prefer a "relaxed" teaching style, simply expecting students' "respect" and cooperation with the knowledgeable leadership they intended to provide. Often, however, the students' behavior distracted them from presenting the inspired lessons they designed.

The extreme difficulties each experienced "finding her own style" demonstrate the close linkage between her attempted teaching strategies and her understandings of and goals for herself as teacher, as discussed above. Their "down" moods made them less confident and caused them to anticipate their own ineffectiveness and "failure." This lack of confidence, in turn, exacerbated the problems. From our perspective–and probably from the students' perspective, as well–their attempts to be "assertive," while designed to make students "like" them, actually had the opposite effect. Their efforts appeared as pleading, whining, or just plain exasperation, in response to which the students escalated their ill-behaviors. An unfortunate side effect of their ineffective attempts to regain "control" was that they began to view the students as adversaries, with themselves in the role of "baby-sitter" to rooms full of "irresponsible," "rude," disinterested students (Angela, Gail).

> Managing these kids is an all-day fight. They don't get better from one day to the next. I have to start over with them every day. They all did very poorly on the test. So if the kids are not here to learn, don't want to learn, and don't learn: Why are they here? (Angela)

The women could not find any method that both "worked" and suited their "personalities." At various points, they each faulted the teacher education program for not better preparing them to succeed in this situation.

> We are learning a lot about "teaching" at the university. I would like to be able to implement some of . . . [the things] we have studied. But there seems to be a lot more going on in classes than teaching, namely disciplining or maintaining order. The message I get is: "Find your own style." If at least half of a teacher's job is maintaining order, shouldn't a portion of teacher's training be about how to do this? (Angela)

Apparently erratic decisions to try yet another "new discipline method" (Nancy) resulted only in feelings of ineffectiveness and inconsistency of practice, reinforcing their existing perceptions that they were too "wimpy" to become good teachers.

Contexts of Student Teaching

Aspects of the women's beginning teaching assignments were poorly matched with their perceived needs and goals. Their schedules provided little time for recreation and recuperation, taking a physical and emotional toll. Some of their mentors were unclear about their expectations or otherwise unable to appropriately assist them. Worse still, none of the four was assigned to teach in her primary or major subject area. While such less than optimal assignments may "work" for some beginning teachers, these insecure women were easily overwhelmed by the managerial aspects of teaching; the added burden of feeling unsure of the subject matter itself or uncertain of support from assigned mentors increased their sense of incompetence to overwhelming proportions. Here, we discuss three aspects of their beginning teaching contexts which contributed to their perceptions of "failure": relationships with their mentors, the efficacy of their mentors' advice, and personal concerns.

Relationships with Mentors

Like the "good girls" described by Belenky et al. (1986), all the women sought to "be liked" and to "please" others: "I've always wanted everybody to like me. I have [an extremely] hard time if somebody is mad at me or feels bad about me; it really affects me" (Nancy). They wanted desperately to "belong," to be understood and accepted as themselves. However, their desire to be "liked" and "please" annoyed those they sought to please–students, cooperating teachers, other school faculty, and even university supervisors–which often prevented establishment of productive peer relationships. In particular, they were puzzled by others' apparently unclear expectations. The women wanted to please their mentors, and tried their best to meet the mentors' expectations, as they understood them. Unfortunately, the women's perceptions of those expectations were often incomplete or misinformed, leading to further feelings of frustration and "failure." For example, Anna initially tried to ask her cooperating teachers what they planned for her to do the next day. However, they often changed their minds at the last minute, and Anna learned to "expect the unexpected."

> Always making an adjustment from hour to hour was [hard]–because I sort of expected that whatever flew [the cooperating teacher's] kite at that moment, either I could be out in the hall with a sectional or I could be conducting the group or I could be running copies or whatever. And I never knew what that was going to be, but I sort of expected that it would be unexpected. (Anna)

They "worried what others [thought]" of their work (Nancy), usually interpreting a lack of praise negatively. For example, because Nancy's principal did not comment directly about an observation of her teaching, Nancy assumed that the principal did not "like [her] . . . [or] think [she was] a good teacher." Gail concluded that her cooperating teacher's lack of feedback implied that he thought "[her] work was never good enough," that "[she was] incompetent and wimpy," and she herself was tempted to agree with him.

Several of the supervisors remarked on the extreme discontinuities Anna and Gail experienced with some of their cooperating teachers' styles. But it was not only dissonant contexts which created problems for the women. When a cooperating teacher exhibited similar problems to their own, that cooperating teacher provided an inadequate model for the women. For example, one of Gail's cooperating teachers employed the same strategies that Gail herself used, lecturing and pleading with the students to "be more mature." To compound the problem, it appeared that Gail's father, a physician, frequently expressed similar opinions of "young kids today;" and Gail lacked effective alternatives to her father's and cooperating teacher's tactics. Nancy experienced a different problem. Another teacher offered to allow Nancy to observe while she taught Nancy's "difficult" eighth grade class. This teacher joked with the students and "found them quite enjoyable," causing Nancy to doubt her own abilities as a teacher.

> My first reaction was disappointment in myself because . . . my history with them . . . has been so unpleasant. The second, more controlled, reaction was that I could flow with them more, not take things so seriously, and joke with them about themselves instead of getting mad and angry with them. (Nancy)

Nancy was intimidated, and even slightly jealous, as she observed that the visiting teacher appeared to have "far more satisfying" relationships with the students than she herself had developed with them.

Advice from Mentors

All four women asked for or were offered advice by their mentors, but the advice often seemed mismatched with their own perception of a situation. Sometimes, the advice made no sense to the women; no matter how hard they tried, they did not know how to implement it.

> [My cooperating teacher explained] it should be very simple [to make charts for marching band], but for some reason it wasn't very simple to me. . . . Two nights ago I worked [on the charts] from 6:00 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. It was frustrating because I didn't know the rules. He only tells me what's wrong after I make them. (Gail)

Other times, because because the beginners could not share the perspective or understandings of their more experienced mentors, advice seemed inappropriate because it did not fit with their own assessment of a situation. For example, Gail wanted help with her classes. However, she often felt the cooperating teacher's advice was unwarranted, since this woman observed only a few minutes and "did not know the exact situation" Gail faced with the students. Gail agonized over her decision to "disobey" the cooperating teacher's advice, but was pleased with the resulting improved behavior the students displayed.

In addition, the women felt that their mentors, in effect, made "molehills out of their mountains" (DeBruyn, 1982). Problems they identified as critical were often brushed off by others as inconsequential. The women sometimes worried a great deal about comments from one "bad" student, which created for them the perception that a whole class was "bad" or that "everyone hated them". The beginning teachers felt their mentors often dismissed their worries, telling stories of their own trials as novices. Yet, the women saw little relationship between these stories and their own situatons; for them, the belief they had "failed" with <u>one</u> student still meant they were "failures" as teachers.

In addition, each student teacher's perceptions of events limited or augmented their apparent ability to "hear" and implement advice (Schmidt & Knowles, 1994). Angela, Gail, Nancy, and Anna did not seem to consider the noisiness and directionless nature of the class we sometimes observed as a problem; consequently, they did not attempt to implement advice for which they saw no need. Anna's cooperating teacher was also unable to help, for a different

reason. Anna admired her only female cooperating teacher, a woman we thought provided a model of the caring, community-minded teacher Anna sought to become. However, that teacher was unable to articulate her "knowing-in-action" (Schön, 1987) or tacit "practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985); consequently, she was unable to explain her classroom practice to Anna in ways that Anna could make her own, or could learn from.

> I was informed by all the teachers that I'm going to have to nail kids to the wall when they deserve it, or I'll never have control of a class. That is just a really tough concept for me. I'm a nice person and I expect people to be nice back– doesn't work sometimes! I guess I want too badly for them all to like me and I guess that's really impossible. There'll always be a few that just won't ever like you and some who might but'll never admit it. (Anna)

Nancy's sources of advice were mostly limited to peers (in the beginning teaching seminar which she regularly attended) and the university faculty and supervisors. From them she sought confirmation of the worth of her practice and explicitly played out potential practices with them. However, for the most part, her interpretations of practice were bounded by technical concerns and she appeared unable to develop more encompassing views of her difficult situations: "I can't seem to translate ideas into practice or see the bigger picture," she lamented.

Personal Concerns

The emotional roller coaster each woman rode during the semester took a tremendous emotional toll on each one. In particular, confronting and reacting to unanticipated student behavior, while attempting to please their mentors, was extremely draining. They experienced great elation when something "worked," only to crash the next day as a problem resurfaced. All four experienced extreme fatigue, some illness, and even noticeable weight loss: "My body tells me as strongly as anything how rough teaching was for me" (Nancy). Each attempted to find personal support in her own way. Nancy and Anna isolated themselves at school by withdrawing from the other teachers. They turned to their boyfriends for support, coping with the emotional stress by arranging to do as little school work in the evenings and weekends as possible. Nancy also sought advice from her teacher-parents. Anna's mother also offered invaluable "logical"

advice to help her survive the semester, by viewing it as an experience that was "good" for her. Of the four women, Anna alone never expressed anger, either with herself or her situation.

Angela expressed her considerable frustrations to her husband and other family members, but they never really understood her plight or empathized which, in a sense, served to alienate her from them. This alienation was especially evident at the times they had discussions about the place of her "chosen profession and vocation" and her future roles in contributing to the family income. Even peers were not greatly supportive because they saw her problems being so unique and they were unable to provide productive assistance. Gail's relationships with her friends and family were fairly unstable. She had few appropriate outlets for the building anger and resentment she steadfastly refused to acknowledge, but she found great solace in her musical accomplishments as a performer on French horn with various local symphonies.

These four women were not particularly self-confident before student teaching, but they were genuinely surprised to actually experience what they perceived as failure. They were goal oriented and accustomed to academic success; they did not see themselves as quitters; they had learned that if one tried hard enough, despite set-backs, one could eventually succeed. Therefore, they experienced difficulty with their own "failure" to be as successful as they had hoped: "I had given the impression that I would not quit, that I would keep on trying to succeed–and then I quit anyway" (Angela). With the exception of Angela, whose decision to withdraw from student teaching was made in consultation with her cooperating teachers and university faculty, the other three women opted to leave formal classroom teaching as a career because they simply became "tired" of coping with the emotional strain it created for them. Towards the final stages of their teaching experiences, Anna appeared to "float" through the semester, claiming she was "too tired" to deal with persistent problems. In contrast, Nancy and Gail, with brief, intermittent periods of "giving up," continued an active struggle, while blaming the students, cooperating teachers, and their university preparation for their problems.

Still, each woman found she learned something positive from the experience. Nancy felt she succeeded in "freeing [herself] from seeing [teaching] as an obligation," as something she "had" to achieve.

> To be quite honest, I hadn't really established my own personal philosophy to any great extent. You think of a music teacher: "Okay, you're a music teacher, and all music teachers are generally the same: they teach music." But that's so untrue. . . . I feel like there's a new revelation every day, not necessarily music even, but just people or anything in general. . . . I'm actually out there in the real world working with real people who are sometimes real idiots. Some are not, but some are. . . . Maybe they think *I'm* an idiot. But they are different and they do things differently and you disagree with it and you have to deal with it. (Anna)

> Can't say exactly why, but the experience has strengthened me. The support I have gotten from [my supervisors] has been invaluable. They have clearly shown me that my ideas have validity and that I'm worth the trouble they have gone to. (Angela)

> I knew that student teaching would somehow help me resolve the problem I have with self esteem. It was like I was seeking out a class in critical thinking, where somebody would finally force me to say why I feel the way I feel. . . . Maybe it's a negative way to get at it, but I realized that I deserve to be treated better than [I was by some people]. At least it's made me start to think that I have some worth. (Gail)

Angela was the only one who methodically (and publicly) went about trying to resolve her feelings of failure, her anger and frustrations, and her extreme disappointment. And, she did this over the course of many months, drawing on her university supervisor for assistance while also partially blaming him and the program for the outcome.

Could Things Have Been Different?: Considerations for Practice

We interpreted the four woman's stories and experiences of practice in light of two premises we hold about the process of learning to teach. First, learning to teach is a developmental process, which involves experiencing various aspects of teaching, learning, and school contexts, then reflecting on those experiences. Second, as individual prospective and inservice teachers reflect on–interpret and give meaning to–their experiences, they construct more and less useful understandings of teaching and of self which inform subsequent teaching practice and reflection.

Wildman, Niles, Magliano, and McLaughlin (1989) suggested that the contexts of beginning teaching may interact in unexpected ways with beginning teachers' personal characteristics: "The difference between a positive beginning experience or disastrous start can be decided before a new teacher even steps into the classroom" (Wildman et al., 1989, p. 480). Documented cases of student teachers "failing" in one situation, yet being more successful in a second placement (e.g., Knowles, Skrobola, & Coolican, in press; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991) suggest that teacher educators would do well to "avoid becoming too complacent too early about a beginner's development" (Wildman et al., 1989, p. 487), and to acknowledge that, due to these interactions among persons and contexts, "it is therefore difficult to predict what will be learned from induction and who will survive" (Wildman et al., 1989, p. 485).

The four women in this study were bright, capable women. Their performance in teacher preparation courses suggested that each had the potential to become a thoughtful and competent teacher. With the exception of Angela, the difficulties they experienced as beginning teachers were, from their mentors' perspectives, not beyond the scope of problems typically experienced by other beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984). Yet, each woman unexpectedly found the actual experience of classroom teaching to be personally unrewarding, even exhausting. They assumed their inability to cope was somehow their own fault; they were reluctant to criticize the situation or others in it. In particular, their perceived inability to handle human relationships–one area in which they generally felt successful–in the complex contexts of the classroom only compounded their feelings of failure, and they concluded their "personality" was not "right" for teaching. Their decisions, to ultimately counsel themselves into other careers, reflected not only mismatches with the contexts of beginning teaching, but with the meanings and personal significance each constructed from those contexts.

> I don't know how to improve how I feel about teaching . . . but I do know that I've got to enjoy it to go on with it. I need to go ahead with activities that I enjoy. . . . One of the most worthwhile lifetime tasks–self actualization–[is] finding your simplest self, [your] most straightforward self. (Nancy)

The case could be made that Nancy, Anna, and Gail initially lacked a genuine commitment to teaching, contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy of "failure." But our experience suggests that the women were no more ambivalent about teaching as a profession than many other beginning teachers. Notably, all the women are still involved with teaching in non-school settings: Nancy is teaching gymnastics and English as a second language to adult Hispanic immigrants; Anna is preparing for ordination to the ministry; Angela is, last we heard, seeking employment in curriculum development; and Gail teaches private music lessons and serves, from time to time, as a substitute teacher in several school districts.

These observations raise questions about whether the women could have been helped to feel more successful as classroom teachers. Did the teacher education program fail to meet their needs? In this section, we propose considerations for practice which might have changed the outcome of initial teaching experiences for at least some of the four women in this study. We suggest opportunities within teacher education to facilitate five types of experiences for prospective and beginning teachers: validating their personal experiences as students and teachers, using those experiences to explore their personal histories and develop models of teaching, helping them create expectations of success, encouraging their comfort with the experience of "not knowing," and creating expectations of appropriate support and mentoring.

Validating Personal Experiences

The difficulties experienced by the four women in this study can be attributed, in large part, to discontinuities between their own understandings of their experiences and the requirements of the schools in which they taught. The discontinuities began when the women were young, involving socialization as students to become "good girls" (Belenky et al., 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), adept at managing to succeed academically using predominantly analytical, sequential modes of learning. Yet, although they were "successful" students, none of the women felt particularly capable as she began to assume a teacher's role.

While some beginning teachers are completely oblivious to their problems (Knowles, Skrobola, & Coolican, in press; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991), these four women knew they were

experiencing difficulty. However, their teaching problems–particularly primary concerns about relationships with students, mentors, and themselves–were not addressed for them in ways that resonated with their experienced needs. The teachers in Hollingsworth's (1992) group told stories of their own experiences, rather than giving each other "answers," allowing them to "both validate the importance of the issue and hear varying practice-based dilemmas and resolutions to incorporate into their own experiential understanding of the issue" (p. 385), suggesting that "'answers' for problems of learning to teach, given with limited attention to new teachers' questions and experiences, [are] often more confusing than supportive" (p. 384).

Even more debilitating, the women in this study were generally unaware of their successful teaching experiences. The women claimed to "need" praise and other supportive comments, yet they refused to believe compliments which did not confirm their own opinions; and, usually, their own opinions of their work were more self-critical than opinions of their mentors. They claimed little personal responsibility for things that went well; they often attributed their success to luck, rather than their own ability (AAUW, 1992). These observations, in turn, suggested to them their own incompetence and lack of fit with the teaching profession. Unfortunately, such misinformed perceptions were the root of the teaching practices they selected in response; it was unlikely their behavior would change without related changes in perceptions (Clark, 1988; Lawes, 1987).

Many of the difficulties the four women experienced become understandable in light of descriptions of women's knowledge as "connected knowing," webs of understanding where facts and people are interrelated and interdependent (Belenky et al., 1986; Noddings, 1984). These women tended to frame problems as dilemmas of care and relationship, rather than clear-cut issues of rights and justice, as many men do. They had difficulty reconciling the simultaneous practice of both care and control (Gilligan, 1982; McLaughlin, 1991). They "felt bad" when connections with others were severed and invested considerable effort to restore relationships with even the most troublesome students (Hollingsworth, 1992). They seemed to devalue their own ideas (AAUW, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986), offering opinions phrased as questions or extremely tentative

statements. Being "fair" was a particular dilemma; they often attributed value to both sides of arguments and found themselves unable to take decisive action (Lampert, 1985).

However, throughout the women's experiences as students and beginning teachers, their own intuitive, "connected" ways of learning and knowing were seldom identified for or by them. Grumet (1988), Hollingsworth (1992), and Noddings (1984) are among those who make a powerful case for validating, within schools and the teaching profession, the "connected" knowledge that many women–and men–possess. As Rorty (1989) suggested, this lack of validation may have serious consequences: "The best way to cause people long-lasting pain is to humiliate them by making the things that seemed most important to them look futile, obsolete, and powerless" (p. 89).

Exploring Personal Histories and Models of Teaching

In retrospect, the women's mentors, including ourselves, did not adequately recognize and respond to their experience of feeling disconnected, not only from their students, but from themselves. The four women represented in this paper were frustrated and discouraged by their perceived inability to find teaching practices that felt comfortable. Lampert (1985) described the importance, in dealing with the dilemmas of teaching, of clearly defining the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

> Because a teacher is present to students as a whole person, the conflicting parts of herself are not separable, one from another, the way they might be if we think of them as names for categories of persons or cultural ideals. A teacher has the potential to act with integrity while maintaining contradictory concerns. . . . When I met my class the morning after recognizing my dilemma, I had not resolved any of the arguments with myself about what to do, but I did have some sense of who I wanted to be. And that made a difference. (p. 184)

Because these women attempted to please nearly everyone around them, they lacked a clear sense of themselves and of the teacher they wanted to become. "Who they wanted to be" was generally submerged by their desire to be what they perceived others expected them to be. The models of teaching they did hold were both positive ("I want to be fun" or "I want to be respected") and, more often, negative ("I don't want to be mean" or "I don't want to be boring"). But both kinds of models were quite vague; the women lacked concrete means to achieve the goals

they had set for themselves, so these understandings usually proved dysfunctional. Like a preservice teacher in a study conducted by Aitken and Mildon (1991), they often felt at a loss for alternatives: "It is not how I want to teach, I just don't know how else to do it" (p. 149). These observations support those who seek ways to encourage beginning teachers to develop specific teaching metaphors (Bullough, 1991; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991), personal histories (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Knowles, 1993; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991), or teacher role identities (Crow, 1987; Knowles, 1992), to make conscious decisions about the kind of teachers they want to become.

> [The role of a mentor is not to] help them feel good while they suffer, . . . [but to help] uncover and articulate the "implicit theories" or schemata through which the world is interpreted and made meaningful. . . [and to help them discover who they are as teachers so that] these implicit meanings become susceptible to the influence of reason. (Bullough, 1990, p. 359)

In retrospect, clearer understandings of elements of the women's personal histories might have alerted us to the problems they were likely to encounter as they assumed new roles in the classroom. Angela participated in a teacher education program which encouraged exploration of her own educational/personal history; and this brought great personal insight to her at various times throughout the year. Anna, Gail, and Nancy did not engage in developing a personal history account relating their assumptions about teaching to their prior experiences–although all three were involved in life history interviews which brought into awareness personal history-based circumstances, events, and understandings. However, it was clear that all four women, experienced as obedient, compliant students themselves, held dysfunctional understandings of the teacher's role, in particular, the nature of "authority" in classrooms (Noblit, 1993). Their own experiences taught them to equate a teacher's disapproval with broken relationship, and they learned, at all costs, to avoid provoking such a state of affairs. They could envision no middle ground between their desire to be "fun" and "friendly" teachers and the extremely uncomfortable actions of "nailing kids to the wall" that seemed necessary to establish classroom order. Each, in her own way, expended tremendous emotional energy dealing with anticipated and actual challenges from their students. They might have benefited from more opportunities to examine

their own experiences as students, discussing or role playing the experiences of others who enjoyed challenging their teachers, to find ways of conveying "authority" that did not feel like being "mean" or "mad", ways that were congruent with "who they were" as persons.

Creating Expectations of Success

> My conclusion from this intense involvement with a failure to learn to teach is that the weak student teacher needs much more help than we normally offer in how to reflect on his/her teaching–on how to consider events of teaching in fine detail and to plan for modest and attainable changes that could gradually produce improvements not only in performance and confidence, but also in an understanding of how different aspects of classroom activities relate and interact. . . . The student teacher who improves slowly or not at all could be said to be experiencing difficulties in perceiving how a host of elements of teaching interact to produce a teaching performance that maintains order and attention while enabling students to interact with the required content at a reasonable pace. (Russell, 1993, p. 151)

As students, these women gained a sense of security both from being clear about a teacher's expectations and from knowing they could meet those expectations. Yet, many aspects of the contexts of teaching were inappropriate for these women. The expectations of their mentors and students were unclear; consequently, they had no certainty they could meet them. When their initial attempts to please did not produce the reactions they hoped for, their insecurity was heightened. Their self-confidence might have been enhanced by more extensive opportunities than they were provided to develop a sense of security in teaching situations. They lacked adequate experience to begin to accurately predict the outcome of their teaching actions. They had few occasions to practice and routinize specific teaching skills (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, & Berliner, 1988; Westerman, 1991) prior to and during student teaching. They needed far more experience managing aspects of classroom activity before being able to meet the cooperating teachers' and supervisors' expectations that they could assume full responsibility for all the complex aspects of classroom life.

Creating Comfort with "Not Knowing"

These women appeared to share an "inability" to accept the advice of their mentors. They often wanted to be told what to do, in prescriptive detail. Yet they were just as often unable to fully implement the advice that was offered. While the women claimed to "not know" how to do

what the mentors described, the mentors concluded the women either had not "heard" the advice, were "unwilling to learn," or had "no desire to improve themselves." It is likely that most of the mentors believed they were being supportive. Yet, they were unaware of the deep panic caused by the women's sense of "not knowing," the paralysis they felt when unable to decide among options, the uneasiness when advice did not match their perceptions of the teacher they wanted to be, exacerbated by their extremely vague understandings of themselves as teachers. As Russell (1993) observed, "here was further reason to see that the failure to act on advice was driven by fundamental differences in perception between those who offered the advice and the individual attempting to improve his teaching" (p. 151).

Because they had "succeeded" in teacher education courses, these women believed they should have learned enough to succeed in their initial teaching situations and were very disappointed in themselves when that did not happen. As successful students, all four women had learned to manage in a world of structured knowledge, where "right" answers were identifiable and expected (Borko & Shavelson, 1983; Tom, 1985; Wilson, 1990). But, the women did not recognize, nor did their mentors help them articulate observations that the "real world" of classrooms was more complex and unpredictable than that. Lampert (1985) suggested a view of teaching problems as dilemmas, situations where a "correct" solution does not exist, where either choice may cause potential hurt.

> Thinking of one's job as figuring out how to live with a web of related problems that cannot be solved seems like an admission of weakness. . . . Images of teachers . . . [as problem solvers usually] portray the conflicts in teaching as resolvable in one way or another. In contrast, the image of the teacher as dilemma manager accepts conflict as a continuing condition with which persons can learn to cope. . . . The work of managing dilemmas . . requires admitting some essential limitations on our control over human problems. (pp. 192, 193)

More supportive environments might have helped these women live more comfortably with the insoluble dilemmas of teaching (Krueger, 1985; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985) and with the role of teacher in all its complexity (Cole & Knowles, 1993a; Thiessen, 1991). They might have benefited from guided experiences in classrooms, developing a variety of alternative framings for a given problem, as well as the ability to generate, test, and evaluate possible solutions. They might

then have understood that not all classroom problems can be "solved," that even experienced teachers do not possess answers to every dilemma. They might have "learned" that the same theory may generate multiple options of practice, or that one practice may be framed and supported by multiple theories. Their mentors could have modeled perceptions of self that permitted them to "not know" as a function of learning, rather than a measure of incompetence (Bolin, 1988; Corcoran, 1981; Eisner, 1991). They then might have been led to discover that "not knowing" is a legitimate and exciting state for teachers, that asking good questions is more important that having right answers (Sinor, 1992).

> The teacher educator who abandons the fiction that teaching can become a technically exact scientific enterprise, and who has the courage to reveal how he or she agonizes over real dilemmas and contradictions–that teacher educator is likely to be successful at helping prospective teachers to prepare themselves for uncertainty. That teacher educator is likely to minimize the boredom and burnout that plague the profession. That teacher educator is asking the right questions about teacher preparation. (Clark, 1988, p. 10)

In sum, at the time these women entered the complex world of classrooms they were not personally and professionally prepared for what lay ahead of them. Their preparation programs did not provide for their diverse needs. In essence, such individualization of programs is not usually afforded teachers in preparation; this in itself is a sad commentary on the state of teacher preparation in general.

Creating Expectations of Support

Beginning teachers will attribute some meaning to their experiences. Particularly when they "fail," the educative quality of that meaning should not be left to chance, but should be the interest of teacher educators.

> The beginning teacher makes the teaching situation either productively or unproductively meaningful. Approaches to supervision that ignore this reality are inevitably miseducative and of limited use to the beginning teacher. (Bullough, 1990, p. 358)

In particular, these women sought, not just advice, but advice offered within the context of a supportive relationship. They evaluated advice offered, in part, by their perceptions of how well the advisor genuinely "knew" them and "understood" their situation. However, the structure of

their teaching experiences impeded establishment of the empathetic relationships the women desired. In many cases, especially with Anna and Gail, conferences were hurried and took the form of a cooperating teacher or supervisor "talking at" the woman. Given the importance women generally attach to listening as a means to establishing trust (Gilligan, 1982), such advice, offered in a hurried, cursory fashion, failed to meet the women's need for validation and encouragement through relationship with others.

These women were ashamed of their inability to cope with the demands of teaching; they were not used to "failing." Through less authoritative, more connected conceptions of supervision, such as suggested by Bullough and Gitlin's (1989) notions of "educative communities," Nodding's (1986) "fidelity," or McLaughlin's (1991) "ethical caring," they might be given courage to confront and explore those feelings, seeking, as Angela did through many hours of "debriefing" discussions, to understand the sources of them. They might have benefited from validation of their feelings, acknowledgment from others that feelings of being overwhelmed and confused may be a necessary phase of the developmental process of learning to teach.

Suggestions for Further Research

We believe that the four beginning teachers' gender was merely symptomatic of deeper beliefs derived from their experiences as students in schools and children in families; however, these experiences were clearly influenced by each one's age and gender. As researchers further identify modes of knowing and development that appear gender-based (Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1984; Levinson, 1978; Lyons, 1983; Miller, 1976; Perry, 1981), we suggest consideration of similar categories as non-gender-dependent. Cognitive and interpersonal styles identified as predominantly male or predominantly female need not be mutually exclusive categories (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). The women in this study needed clearer conceptions of authority and fairness as well as caring and connectedness, central concepts for the development of all teachers in preparation.

Our findings suggest that teacher educators could benefit from more broad conceptions of the ways in which individuals learn to teach. Recognizing the strengths of multiple conceptions of human development and knowledge encourages acceptance of a wider variety of growth patterns as non-deviant or "normal." In particular, our findings suggest that teacher education programs cannot be both tightly prescriptive and, at the same time, appropriately helpful for each individual enrolled in them. Not all women beginning teachers experience lack of confidence and dysfunctional understandings of authority, and some men do experience such concerns. Many aspects of teacher education have been shown to be useful, and some of these include: particular characteristics of cooperating teachers (Bunting, 1988; Copeland, 1981), schedules or placement structures (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987), mastery of certain teaching competencies (Madsen, Standley, Byo, & Cassidy, 1992), skills of reflective thinking (Richert, 1990, Zeichner, 1981-1982), certain supervisory formats (Bullough & Gitlin, 1989; Gitlin, Ogawa, & Rose, 1984), or seminars (Goodman, 1984; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Yet, our findings support others which suggest that no one factor is guaranteed to assist in learning to teach, raising ethical questions about many current practices for selection, placement, and supervision of preservice teachers (Knowles & Sudzina, 1992a).

By abandoning our own preconceptions of how others learn to teach, we may learn a great deal from our students of teaching. We may be more alert to hear the questions they are asking, not just the information we want to tell them or want them to know. They may–inadvertently or intentionally–provide clues about their expectations for themselves as teachers: the levels of support and independence they desire, the kinds of placements they might find useful, the kinds of school environments which might provide appropriate levels of dissonance to supportively challenge them to grow. Our findings suggest that compliant students, particularly those who appear shy and unassertive in university classrooms, may need more–and more structured and sequential–experiences to gain the confidence, independence, and competence necessary to succeed in more traditional student teaching situations. Further research in this area might explicate more and less effective qualities of particular matches among beginning teachers, mentors, and contexts.

Such descriptions might help teacher educators begin to identify in advance, rather than in retrospect, particular personal qualities, predispositions, or beliefs about teaching, learning, and schools, that might place particular beginning teachers "at risk" of "failure."

Not all beginning teachers will be successful, despite our best efforts. Gail's supervisor found great personal satisfaction in both his own music teaching and in helping others learn to teach. He believed Gail was potentially a gifted teacher. He became quite angry during the semester, believing that Gail's placements were "clearly inappropriate," and he had difficulty understanding why Gail seemed so resistant to his efforts to help her view herself as successful.

> I kept wondering, what can I say to make this more positive for Gail? And [one of the professors] said, "Maybe she just doesn't want to teach." I had never really thought about that. If she does want to teach, she sure isn't giving us any indication of that. I think I have done what I could. She's bright, she's well organized when she wants to be, musically she has everything she needs. But she just doesn't have the desire. And without that, she can't fix the other things. (Gail's supervisor)

In particular, beginning teachers who are "failed" by others (e.g., Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles, Skrobola, & Coolican, in press), or who choose to see themselves as failures, should not be permitted to "fade away" (Knowles & Cole, with Presswood, 1994). More attention should be given to "debriefing" them, helping to reconceptualize their experiences, not as "failures," but as opportunities for growth (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989).

> To what degree is the student teaching experience the end of pre-service preparation? In one view, student teaching is the final stage. Either you pass or fail, and failed student teachers, for all intents and purposes, no longer exist! Our position is that student teaching . . . is not the end. The final stage is reflection upon the [experience]. (Knowles & Hoefler, 1989, p. 21)

Summary

In this study, we examined four women's experiences of "failure" as beginning teachers. These perceived "failures" resulted, not from any single factor, circumstance or occasion, but from the cumulative effect of events and experiences which they interpreted as confirming their incompetence for teaching. We identified several influences on their sense of failure, which had common roots in their experiences as children in schools and in families. They had few

opportunities to identify and validate who they were and who they hoped to become as teachers. It appeared, in essence, that negative and dysfunctional memories of themselves as students, combined with unawareness of students unlike themselves, were behind many of the problems they experienced in developing effective teaching techniques. They also possessed underdeveloped conceptions of instructional techniques and management routines appropriate for working in complex classrooms and with well-socialized students, and lacked the self-confidence and understandings necessary to effectively implement their mentors' advice. Established patterns of social interaction and learning confirmed their sense of misfit in the school environment; particular personality traits, such as unassertiveness, compliance, and shyness, contributed to their problems.

The findings of this study suggest the validity of multiple conceptions of teachers' learning and knowing identified by prior research. We also corroborated evidence of qualitative differences in the thinking of novice teachers, and suggest further research to examine the influence on and interaction of personal history and gender with novices' cognitively-based understandings of teachers, their roles, and their actions. We suggest consideration of more connected, collaborative styles of supervision, which might help individual beginning teachers explore and validate their own experiences, so that they may view their unique personal qualities and skills as contributing, not to perceived "failure," but to potential success.

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